# The English of the Pennsylvania Germans in York County, Pa.

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In 1935 Mr. G. G. Struble of Lebanon Valley College admirably presented in his article on "The English of the Pennsylvania Germans" (1) the pecularities of vocabulary, pronounciation, and sentence intonation which dominate the speech of that group of people. Struble's work covered the territory now roughly outlined by the boundaries of Northampton, Lehigh, Berks, Lebanon, Lancaster, and York counties. This section of the country forms also the nucleus of the regions where the "Deitsch," or Pennsylvania-German Dialect, is spoken. (2) Lebanon Valley College offers an excellent starting-point for observations in this field; the language of the students alone affords a rich sampling of the speech found in the several surrounding counties. Struble's treatise was later supplemented by the important contribution of Mr. E. R. Page (3) (Central College), whose division of "four levels of speech" (p. 203) simplifies considexably the grouping of the speakers according to the amount of Deitsch-coloring in their lingo.

Both of these articles centered least attention on the speech of York County, which contains some singular provincialisms in addition to the general speech characteristics of the Pa. Ger. region. It is noteworthy that these several specialties are foreign to the inhabitant of the counties east of the Susquehanna River, and that, vice versa, the speaker in York Co. is totally unfamiliar with a number of the words and expressions of his eastern brother, some of which he might even mockingly ridicule at times. Perhaps the most important reason for this segregation of York Co. is the fact that the "Deitsch" spoken there has some distinguishing characteristics peculiar only to that county; for, we know that the English of the Pennsylvania German regions is built upon a rather definite framework of "Deitsch." The "Deitsch" of York Co. was influenced early by Swiss dialects and hence a few of the differences which survive at present.

The section, then, which I am treating here is roughly enclosed in a semi-circle whose diameter runs north and south through the city of York and whose circumference is partly formed by the Susquehanna River. Specifically, the region includes the following: proceeding south from York to Jacobus, Seven Valleys, Loganville; eastward to Dallastown, Spry, Yoe, Red Lion, Frysville, Windsor, and Craley; northeastward to Long Level, East Prospect, Yorkana, Delroy, Stony Brook, Hallam, and Wrightsville; northwestward to Emigsville, Manchester, Mt. Wolf, Zions View, Strinestown, and as far north as York Haven and possibly Newberrytown.

Most of the speech idioms which occur in this region fall in the so-called "third level," outlined by Page as: "(3) the 'average' language of the region, showing fewer traces (i e., of the Deitsch), but still different enough from average American to be shocking to the stranger" In the case of some expressions there is a definite overlapping with the "second level," or "(2) a semi-literature English showing many traces of vocabulary, syntax, and pronounciation taken directly from Deitsch" I shall present my material and examples in their morphological groupings with any remarks or explanations which may seem necessary. Many of the idioms coincide with those given by Struble, but emphasis will be placed on those which have not been mentioned before. Any repetition of material cited in former articles is done purposely in order to give the reader a more general view of the whole.

The "Deitsch" sources of most of the following expressions will not be stated, since they are obvious to anyone knowing the Pennsylvania German dialect. The material presented here is given objectively without etymological explanations except when deemed necessary.

1—In American Speech, Vol. X, No. 3, Oct. 1935.
2—Cf. the Preface to M. B. Lambert's "Pennsylvania-German Dictionary;" Vol. XXX, Pennsylvania-German Society, Philadelphia, 1924.
3—"English in the Pennsylvania German Area;" in American Speech, Vol. XII, No. 3, Oct. 1937.

## VERBS

**to get off**—to talke at length; "He got off a whole row about not makin' no money."

**to wait on**—to wait for (German, warten auf); this, of course is also common elsewhere.

**to slop the hogs**—to feed the hogs; the verb is made from the noun "slop," which is the common name for the mixture of mashed grain and water given to hogs.

**to spell someone off**—to take a turn in relieving someone (as of driving); "He started to fall asleep at the wheel, so I spelled him off."

**to pull for out**—to leave; if the destination is expressed one alters the idiom to "We pulled out for York about 1 o'clock," otherwise one says "It's gettin' late—let's pull for out."

**to wonder**—used impersonally; "It wonders me that she would say that."

**to give**—to be (3rd pers. sing, only); "It's gonna give a rain today yet." This, of course, is the German "es gibt" used in its various tenses.

**to dopp**—to walk clumsily, awkwardly; "He was so drunk, he dopped all over the floor;" "He don't walk right—he dopps half the time still;" cf, the adj. "doppi."

**to kutz** ("u" as in Eng. but)—to vomit; it is the only verb ever used to express this idea, even in the best of society. Its inflection is weak.

**to make**—Ger. losgehen; some of tne pecular uses of this word have been adequately treated by Struble. The meaning mentioned here is best illustrated by the following examples: "If your pop catches you doing that it'll make!" "This party's dead now, but wait till Joe comes—then it'll make" "When the teacher called me up front for cheatin', I knew right there it was gonna make!"

**to make shut, open**—to shut, to open; "Make the door shut, it's cold in here." The German influence is obvious.

**to make down**—to rain; "Better run for home, 'cause it's gonna make down any minute now!"

**to fress**—to eat (speaking of people); this word belongs definitely to the second level. It is used by only a few people, mostly in the rural districts, but it is not infrequently heard among the townspeople. Its inflection is weak. Curiously enough, its use in the English of York Co. provokes a laugh among the German or the Pennsylvania German dialect speakers of other regions, since these use the word only when speaking of animals.

**to rutch**—to slide (as on a chair); "Rutch over a little and give me some room." Cf. the adjective "rutchi."

NOTE.—Throughout this article the letter "u" in words of German origin will represent the sound of "oo" in "foot" unless otherwise indicated.

**to smutz** (also schmutz)—as in Ger. it means to kiss, to caress, to "neck;" it is usually used with the prep. "over," as "She likes him to smutz over her."

**to kreissel**—(used personally and impersonally) to disgust, to sicken, to nauseate, to "turn one's stomach;" "That mess kreissels me." "That old man with his crusty (dirty) face kreissels me." Struble has mentioned only the adjective "greisslich." However, in York Co. the initial consonant is definitely a "k" and the verb is as common as the adjective.

**to have dare**—to be allowed; "He don't have dare to go."

**to make out**—to plan, to decide; "We made out we'd go to the show."

**to schussel**—to hurry; cf. adj. "schussli."

## NOUNS

**hutzel**—anything all dried up; originally the word meant "a dried up peach" in the Dialect (cf. Lambert), but it has come to mean something dried up in a more general sense. I have even heard the word used somewhat superfluously in "That looks like an old dried up peach hutzel." It can also mean "old woman" as in "She's just an old hutzel."

**hutchi**—little horse; a direct borrowing from the dialect word for colt or foal (cf. Lambert).

**schnavegave**—a little drink of any sort of spirits; the word really belongs to Lancaster Co. It was brought over to York Co. by local people who commuted to Lancaster Co. to work or lived there for some time.

**hutch**—error, mistake, jumble; "I made a hutch out of it."

**flyin' horses**—merry-go-round; note the formation of this and other similar compounds.

**schinnehannes**—the men who hauls away dead animals; in the Pa. Ger. Dialect it is properly pronounced "schinnerhannes. Lambert gives merely "term of opprobrium." Struble also mentions the word but does not explain it. It comes from Schinder-Hannes (Hans) and means literally "scavenger Johnny." The "Schinder" in Germany between 1400 and 1650 was one of the "Unehrlichen" who made a living by buying up old skins of carcasses, drying them and selling them later at a cheap price. "Schinnerhannes" is used today in South Germany with precisely the same meaning which it has in York Co.

**deckels**—the cymbals used in bands; the word obviously comes from the Ger. for lid or cover of a pot or kettle.

**lung fever**—pneumonia.

**speck**—fat (of meat).

**flitch**—bacon.

**schleckesch**—good taste, good flavor: "Boy, this pie has the schleckesch!" Cf. G. schleckerig schlecken.

**shnavel**—visor (of a cap); probably from the Ger. "Schnabel," beak or bill of a bird. Cf. English "bill" of a cap; this latter is also the regular word in the Middle West.

**gust** ("u" as in "but")—storm, thunderstorm; "It's gonna give a gust." This word is the true translation of Ger. Sturm "a strong blast of wind," since "Gewitter" is the Ger. equivalent for Eng. storm. Through a confusion of meanings in the two languages the word may have come to signify "storm," the Eng. cognate of "Sturm," which is the word it originally translated.

**satzpaddle**—wooden paddle used to stir dough for making bread; also used for spanking children. "If you don't behave I'll get the satzpaddle after you!"

**dopp**—one who walks clumsily, awkwardly—one who "dopps;" "He can't walk right no-how—he's the dumbest dopp I ever seen;" cf. the verb "dopp," adj. "doppi."

**tut**—paper bag; the same word is used in western Illinois but pronounced with a long vowel (tu:t).

**wutzi**—pig; the word is also found in Pa. Ger. and Ger. dialects. One always imitates a pig by saying "wutz wutz" in the form of a grunt in the back of the throat.

**'apnemme**—loss of weight during illness; cf. Ger. abnehmen. The word was first used in speaking of new-born babies who always lose a certain amount of weight in the first two weeks after their birth; later it was applied to anyone who lost weight. The curious thing about the word is this: if a stranger hears it and asks the speaker what it means, the latter will say "it means 'the take off!' "and expects the stranger to understand without any further explanation.

**katzenjammer** ("j" equals Eng. y)—"hangover."

**katy-did**—a game in which a small round piece of wood (about 4 inches long) pointed at both ends (thus resembling a katy-did) is knocked from player to player by another longer stick or cane. The little piece which is struck is called "the katy." In Lehigh Co. the game is known as "nipsie;" the dialect verb is "nipsie schpiele."

**krentzels**—doughnuts or "fasnachts" made at "fasnacht" time; cf. Ger. Kraenzlein, Kraenzl, little wreath. (Cf. Struble p. 204).

**wamus, or wumis**—jacket, vest.

**smutz** (also schmutz)—smeary dirt of any kind, as mud; cf. the verb and also the adj. "smutzi."

**sender**—rebuke, animadversion, reproof; the York Co. expression "I gave him a sender" would be rendered in general American by "I told him where to get off (at)!"

**high cake**—layer cake.

**snit** (also schnit)—piece; "Give me one more little snit of meat."

**snevli** (or, schnevli)—tail of a chicken; the word was used by only one person, yet it is hardly self-coined since it could very probably be a diminutive of "schnavel," which is the 'front' beak or nose of the bird; cf. a Maryland expression "the Pope's nose" meaning also the tail of the chicken. The usual expression in York Co. is the colloquial "the piece that went over the fence last." In the Deitsch there are a number of words for this part of the animal; at Arthur, Ill. there are no less than five different words in the Deitsch for it—all of them unknown in Pa.

## ADJECTIVES

**schussli**—used to describe one who does things carelessly and in a hurry; cf. the verb "to schussel."

**kreissli**—sickening, repulsiye, nauseating; cf. the verb "to kreissel." Struble gives "greisslich" for other Pa. Ger. regions.

**smutzi** (also schmutzi)—dirty and smeary, as of mud; cf. the verb and noun "to smutz" and "smutz."

**strubli**—dishevelled (of hair).

**auskeschpielt**—played out, exhausted.

**bruntzbunk**—grouchy.

**apschtanne**—done for, finished; "This peach is apschtanne." Lambert gives "abschtennich—showing signs of decay."

**mensche-shy**—bashful; used more often when speaking of a girl.

**rutchi**—fidgety; literally "sliding around." Said of a small child who is nervous and restless. The word does not exist as a noun in York Co. (cf. Page, p. 203, 205).

**wonderful**—awful, horrible; Struble notes the peculiar use of this word. Cf. "There was a wonderful accident up the state-road—two people were killed!"

**from new**—used in the expression: "He bought that machine from new," meaning "not second-hand."

**different ones**—used substantively to mean "several people" as in: "Different ones say she is gonna die soon." Cf. Ger. verschiedene.

**doppi**—clumsy, awkward; "He's so doppi on his feet that he don't walk right no-how;" Lambert gives the dialect word "dappich, tappisch" (from dialectal German "dabbig," or German "tappisch"), also the noun "dappes, dappel;" cf. in this article the noun "dopp" and the verb "to dopp."

## Adverbs, Prepositions, Miscellaneous

**still**—this word and its synonym "yet" are used repeatedly in the sense of "sometimes," "at times," "at irregular intervals;" cf. the following examples: "We go over to see them still" (i. e., now and then), or "When she comes up to the picnics still, I always get to see her," or "He turns his foot in when he walks still" (i. e., not always). This and the following word cause more misunderstanding among strangers than probably any other non-dialetcal word in the York Co. vernacular.

**so**—in a specific state or manner, also means unaltered: cf. "She likes it just so" (i. e., just exactly right—not too sweet and not too sour, etc.) On the other hand, one says: "Don't put no sugar on mine—I'll eat it so" (i. e., plain, unchanged). This last meaning is similar to the meaning conveyed in Struble's example (p. 167): "Do you want to go for steady or for so?" (i. e., "do you want to be my regular boyfriend or just come around for a date now and then?")

**already** (usually pronounced a'ready)—used superflously to convey the meaning of Ger. schon, as in: "Have you ever been to N. Y.? Yes, I've been there already," or "I've been at shows already where they turned off all the lights," or "I've seen dogs already that didn't have no tail."

**once** (t)—used in the sense of Ger. mal (einmal), as in: "Come here once," "Try a piece once," "Dive in once."

**what fer**—what kind of; obviously from the Ger. was fuer (ein)?

**a while**—used peculiarly to mean "meanwhile," as in: "You lock up the house and I'll go out and start up the machine a while."

**this long time already**—for quite some time; cf. "He's been here (or, he's here) this long time already," or "I knew he was dead this long time already."

**out from in under**—this combination of prepositions is regularly used when, for instance, a ball rolls under something; one says: "Pull it out from in under."

## PRONOUNCIATION:

Struble has treated (pp. 165-167) the more important features of pronounciation and intonation found in the "Deitsch" districts. I should like to add here one other characteristic of sentence-intonation which is common in York Co., namely that of the "backward question." In this type of question the finite verb is in initial position and takes the principal accent, the rest of the sentence "sloping down" as it were; sometimes another word near the end of the question will take a kind of secondary accent, for example: **"Are** you goin' down **town?"** or **"Is** he gonna go?" The short form of this type of question is rendered by verb, subject, and the word "though." For instance, if someone should make a statement which is rather difficult to believe such as "John has finally decided to leave his wife," the listener would 'reply' by saying **"Is** he gonna leave his wife?" or simply **"Is** he though?"

In York Co. a "wee" (v) is pronounced like a "w". This is especially true among the older people: the butcher has "some good weal today," the grocer some "winegar," the neighbor is trimming his "grape wines," etc, etc. The younger folk who have attended high school drop this practise entirely In other parts of Pennsylvania one mocks the "York County Dutchman" by saying this sentence: "Pennsylwania wolunteers went down the walley firing wolley after wolley all in wain." The above examples illustrate the "w"-pronounciation of "v" in initial position. Intervocalic "v" usually remains a "v"—sound, or becomes the bilabial "v" in some speakers' mouths; a similar change happens in the case of a word like "view," where the "w"-sound would be rather difficult. Even intervocalic (w) becomes a "v"-sound: for example, the nickname for "Howard" is "Hav"—this is merely a shortening of the full form "Haverd." "Sauer kraut" has two pronounciations: if the first word is given two syllables it is analogous to the preceding example, "saver kraut;" if it is pronounced as one syllable it takes the sound of the regular Deitsch "au" with very little diphthongization, "saur kraut."

Other peculiarities of pronounciation follow: the vowel-sounds of "itch" and "deaf" become the long "ee" of E. feet, i. e. "eetch" and "deef." Words ending in -a take the "ee"-sound, "extra"—"extree." "Apple" is often pronounced with the "a"-sound of the "Deitsch" word, and "April" is regularly pronounced "ay-pryle." The German preference for stressing root syllables is sometimes overdone, so that a strong secondary accent must be put on the following syllable with curious results: constable—"kun-stuble," article "ar-tickle." "Calm" and "alms" are regularly heard as "cam" and 'ams" without the slightest trace of an "l."

I should also like to add here a note about the odd lengthening of vowels which come at the end of a sentence. Such vowels are not diphthongized as in general American but elongated into a sing-song effect which approaches the vowel-sounds found in Swedish. The sound of the vowel is ended by the utterance of the Shva-sound "a" used here—inverted "e" is usually used. For example, one hears "When are you gonna go (go-a)?" It almost sounds like (go-wa) to the stranger's ear. If the word "you" were to be stressed the effect would be thus: "When are you (you-a) gonna go (go-a)?" One can imagine how singular the following sentence would sound to the stranger: "What are youse (you-az) gonna do (do-a)?"

The influence of the Alemannic dialects has been mentioned as an important factor in accounting for the singlarities of the "Deitsch" and the English of York County. Two other factors certainly play their part: the County is geographically separated from its eastern neighbors by the Susquehanna River; and, the social intercourse of these people takes place largely within the region outlined at the beginning of this article The various towns included in this area have their own baseball league, they attend each other's "picnics" (festivals), they are present at each other's school plays and church cantatas, and thus they keep their language rather centralized. Furthermore, the children learn many of these peculiarities (especially of pronunciation) in the lower grades because their teachers use them constantly.

# G'schpass aus alt Pennsylvaani

The following amusing items were collected from early Pennsylvania German papers, by Professor Ralph Wood, of the German Department of Princeton University.

From the **Pennsburg Democrat**, April 22, 1857:

A farmer from Berks County died and went to heaven and without any difficulty. With no surprise over his arrival he was admitted by Saint Peter.

"But why was there such a great hullabaloo made over the fellow who just got in," the farmer asked, "and none over me?"

"Oh, we know you are all right," answered Saint Peter. "You are a farmer from Berks. We get hundreds of them every year, but that was a lawyer, the first one in two hundred years. We just had to celebrate.

From the **Schippacher Neutralist**, Feb. 3, 1852:

### WARUM SIE HEIRATEN

Der Eine tut's um die Dukaten,
Der Zweite um ein hibsch Gesicht,
Der Dritte kann nicht lenger warten,
Der Vierte weil man so spricht,
Der Finfte winscht sich zu ergetzen,
Der Sechste ist vom Trost geplagt,
Der Siebte will sich einmal setzen,
Der Achte such sich just eine Magd,
Den Neunten quaelt die Langeweile,
Den Zehnten der Liebsten Eile,
Der Elfte und Zwelfte sind so dumm,
Sie wissen selber nicht warum,

From the **Sumneytown Bauern Freund**, January 8, 1834:

A preacher recently married a German couple, for which he required a fee of ten dollars.

"How is that?", asked the bridegroom, "The gentleman, whom you married last, gave me the assurance that he paid you only five dollars."

"True," answered the clergyman, "But he is an Irishman, whom I have already married for the sixth time. He is a customer. You I'll probably never see again."

Courting was a serious business in old Pennsylvania, as may be deduced from the following article from the **Pennsburg Democrat**, April 22, 1857:

### EPPES VON DER CAERPET PARTY

Do is eppes, un sell muss heut in der Demokrat, sonst geht's verleicht vergesse. Do howwe iwwer em Hiwwel gebt's alsemohl Sache, die sich en ausgestoppter Butzemann bucklich driwer lache kennt.

Do hen zweh von unsere Nochbermaed die letzt Woch emol owets en Caerpet Party gestaert, un sell hot alles gebotte, was ich noch do howwe angetroffe hab. All die Buwe un Maed in der ganze Nochberschaft ware dort un all die Caerpetlumpe, wu selle Owet genaeht sin worre, kennt unser Soph in ehner Stunn naehe. En Dehl hen en grosser Tisch umringt un die annere hen in der Stubb rumher gesotze un naerrische Sache geschwetzt. Ich hab ziemlich ball gesehnen, dass unser Knecht, der John sich ziemlich gross gemacht hot bei der Saell Pannestiel...awwer die Saell hot net recht ins Geschirr gewott, weil sie unser Saem besser gegliche hot. Sell hot der John net verstanne, un er hot all die Zeit gemehnt, die Saell daeht ihn gleiche, weil er newig ihr sitze hot derfe. Der Saem hot grad von der Saell niwwer gesotze und der Weg wie sie mit die Fuess Klafier unner'm Tisch gespielt hen, war net schloh. Un sell hot der John net ausgefunne, bis ehmol der Saem der Saell en rechter Twist mit die Fuess hot gewwe wolle, un hot der John getroffe, nort is awwer der John ziemlich ball uf die Spur kumme, was los is ...awwer er hot nix gesaht; er hot gedenkt: Was Fresse for die Gans is, is ah Fresse for der Gansert. Ziemlich ball war's 12 Uhr un die Paerty hot ahfange ufbreche. Zweh un zweh sin mitnanner fort un zuletzt ware just noch ihre vier iwwrig, der John, die Saell, die Molly Krollkopp un der Saem. Die Nacht war so dunkel wie en Finsternis in Bahmwoll eigewickelt...un die Saell hot ihre Hahne gespannt for der Saem. Awwer wie's abgange is, hot der Saem die Molly in sei Wage genumme un ball ware sie aus em Staab. Nau war der John un die Saell noch iwwerig; der John hot sei Gaul eigespannt, un wie er fertig war, hot die Saell sich so schmaegelig beim John angelosst, wie wann sie ihn fresse kennt. Der John hot awwer gedenkt, "Never mind, Saell, du bist noch net aus em hohe Gras. Un wann du die Nacht derhehm schlofst, so gehst du net vor 3 Uhr ins Bett." Sie is noch mal ins Haus gesprunge ihr Hensching hole...un just wie sie ins Haus war, hot der John die Wipp gekraeckt, un ab is es gange uhne die Saell. Die Saell is hinne noch gesprunge un hot gekrische wie en Insch, awwer der John hot nix gehoert. Un bis 3 Uhr war die Saell ah derhehm. Der John hot vor ihrem Haus gehalte, bis sie hehmkumme is, nort hot er ihr gerufe, er haett geglaabt, sie un der Saem daehten noch Fuess spiele unnig em Tisch. Die Zeit is Saell en gans anner Maedel un sie will ken Buh mehr fuhle.